

# RICHMOND F.C.

“THE TIGERS”

A PROUD HISTORY OF A GREAT CLUB

AS TOLD BY THOSE WHO MADE IT HAPPEN



*Richmond Football Club*

**TIGER THEME SONG**

*TO THE TUNE OF ROW. ROW. ROW.*

*We're from Tigerland  
A FIGHTING FURY  
We're from Tigerland  
in any weather  
You will see us with a grin  
Risking head & shin  
If we're behind, then never mind  
We'll FIGHT AND FIGHT AND WIN.  
For We're from Tigerland  
We never weaken till the final  
siren's gone*

*Like the TIGER of old  
we're STRONG and we're bold  
For we're from Tiger (Yellow & Black)  
we're from Tigerland*

Tigers of the 1960s learn their new club song.  
Clockwise from top left: Neville Crowe, Kevin Smith,  
Mike Perry, John Ronaldson, Dick Clay, Owen Madigan.

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UPDATED AND REVISED EDITION

INTERVIEWS BY RHETT BARTLETT

HISTORICAL ESSAYS BY TREVOR RUDELL

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## Eat 'em alive, Tigers

Richmond had won its first premiership and we were celebrating. There he stood, a crayfish in each hand, ruckman Barney Herbert, rampant, on the pedestal of Richmond Mayor G.G.Bennett's statue with a background relief of the Richmond Town Hall.

Barney was yelling: 'What did we do to them?!'

'Eat em Alive!!' roared the mob, and Barney waved the crays again and again.

VIC THORP, PREMIERSHIP PLAYER, 1920-21



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Jumper of Roger Dean,  
1969 RFC premiership captain.

## INTRODUCTION

# A REMARKABLE JOURNEY

BY RHETT BARTLETT



**I**t has been 12 years since my journey begun.

With an analogue dictaphone (now since retired) in hand and my car full of petrol (the car since retired, too) I drove off on September 30, 2000, to conduct my first interview.

Joe Murdoch looked confused. The then 92-year-old, who had played in two Richmond premierships in the 1930s, was perhaps expecting someone much older. But he got me who, at 21 years of age, had travelled up to Castlemaine, Old Joe had agreed to have all facets of his Richmond career recorded. More importantly, about certain events of his football life that still resonated, most notably the Gordon Coventry incident. And that's how this book began.

By 2007, with the first print of this book I had recorded some 65 interviews. By 2012, it has grown to more than 100. The idea was born from Lawrence S. Ritter's remarkable baseball publication *The Glory of their Times*. Ritter travelled the breadth of America in the 1960s, speaking to old baseballers, some of whose careers dated back to the 1880s. What he collected and recorded was immeasurable. And it had me thinking about the history of Richmond F.C., and how the first-hand accounts of many players before the 1960s were gone or at least fading out of reach of the supporters.

Some interviewees lasted 30 minutes; others, like Sid Dockendorff, went six hours across three sessions. The last interview ended with a powerful lamp shining on my face so the ailing Sid could make out who he was speaking to.

He was, after all, 94 at the time.

The interviews were conducted in family rooms and dining rooms, on balconies and couches; in Traralgon, Castlemaine, St Kilda, Woodend and Carlton; in weight rooms, cafés, at businesses, over the phone and at the football club museum. Once the interviews were completed, the participant's answers were collaborated to create their oral history. Only

slight editing was required to ensure that relevant topics and opinion were coupled together.

Across 12 years of interviews, many memories stay in my mind.

The 'Gentle Giant', Roy Wright, driving up from Duck Arm in Gippsland in the smallest car imaginable, and dropping by my father's house for the interview on his way to see his dying friend Doug Heywood. They would pass away within four days of each other in mid-2002.

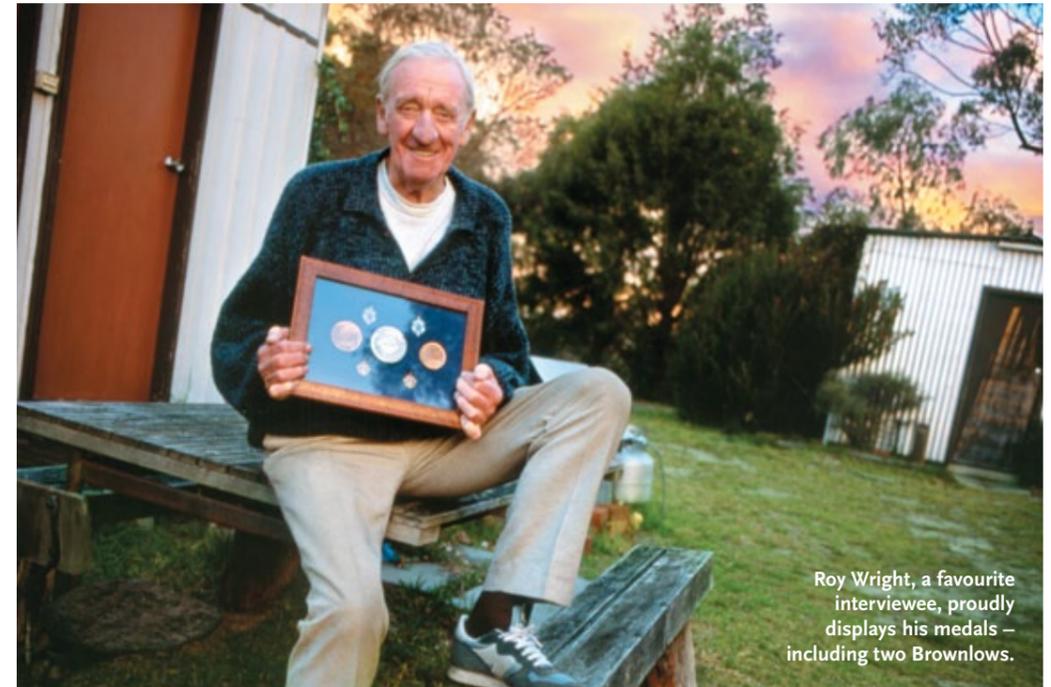
Or heading to Castlemaine, losing my way, and asking directions at the local petrol station. The attendant didn't know the whereabouts of the street I was looking for. "Joe Murdoch?" I asked. He simply pointed north: "Drive two more blocks and turn right at the roundabout."

Bob Wiggins finally agreed to be interviewed after numerous requests over the course of a year; he then explained to me before the interview that he had cancer, and was dying. His last words to me as I left will remain with me forever, "Thank you for making me forget about the worries in my life." He lost his battle six months later.

Jack Malcomson, who penned the Richmond theme song, hummed and played the trumpet part in his rendition of Tigerland. Polly Perkins sang for me the ditties he would sing for the players some 60 years earlier. And Jack Watson emotionally recalled the last time he saw Bill Morris alive.

Interviewing Neville Crowe at the club had a personal feel for both of us. He talked of the drama of the dismissal of Kevin Bartlett, as coach. The appearance of us both in the Richmond administration building raised a few eyebrows.

I learnt many things from this journey. Everyone has a Jack Dyer story, for instance. And each person in some way has been saddened by football as much as enlivened by it, even if it is simply mourning the



Roy Wright, a favourite interviewee, proudly displays his medals – including two Brownlows.

passing of their career, or teammates they cherished in a special bond. Finally, I have found that football makes it easier for generations to talk to each other.

Unfortunately, some former players passed away before I could interview them. Mike Patterson, Geoff Strang, Terry Smith, Denis Collins and Peter Welsh all left this world far too early.

Thankfully, I was able to record the memories of Des Rowe, Roy Wright, Sid Dockendorff, Joe Murdoch, George McHutchison, Maurie O'Connell, Len Ablett, Arthur Barr-Kemp, Frank Bourke Snr, Allan Cooke, Polly Perkins, Frank Hughes Jnr, Max Oppy and Maurice Rioli before they passed away.

**A publication of this size is made up of the generosity of the sum of those who are in it.** And below is a list of those who were very generous in supplying time to ensure this book reached the standard I had envisioned.

I am grateful for the support of publisher Geoff Slattery, for his decision that there was value in the interviews I had done, and that the transcript of the Des Rowe chapter was strong enough to warrant a book. As well, the contribution of all the editors for their knowledge, advice and understanding for a budding author was immeasurable.

With more than 120,000 words transcribed, the onus of checking facts and grammar fell to several people – my thanks goes out to Ron Reiffel, Bill Meaklim and Kevan Carroll.

The Richmond Football Club Museum, especially curator Roland Weeks, was most supportive in allowing the inclusion of its material. Equally, the club's Historical Group, provided unlimited assistance and was the place to turn to for my endless questions.

Trevor Ruddell and the staff at the MCC provided many illuminating chapters and photographs for the book. Trevor, a fellow historical group member, wrote the excellent "era-setting" chapters in this book – his contribution is therefore significant in helping the book come together.

The AFL, in particular Col Hutchison, assisted with statistical data. And at News Limited, the help of Vicki Ritchie and her staff was also appreciated.

As well, to my close friends, work colleagues, my former English teacher Dan Hartley, former Richmond VFA player Alexander Salton and those who have offered support and advice, I am forever thankful.

Of course, to every player who allowed me to invade their privacy for a few hours, and their respective wives and families for providing endless conversation and cups of tea, thank you.

A publication of more than 12 years required the love of my dear parents, Kevin and Denise Bartlett, and my sisters Sharna, Cara and Breanna.

My passion for football history is as strong as ever. I will continue to interview former players about their memories of Tigerland. Our history must not be lost.

RHETT BARTLETT, NOVEMBER 2012

